

South Florida stops spraying for mosquitoes near rare butterflies

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The Florida atala butterfly, pictured here laying eggs on a Florida coontie, was 1 of 5 types of butterflies that FIU scientist Gary Rand used in research that found routine spraying for mosquitoes is more damaging to butterflies than previously thought. Brian K. Mealey/TNS

Mosquitoes are a type of insect. They're very small. They look like flies. They like to live in warm, hot places. They can be harmful. If a mosquito bites someone, that person can get sick.

Most of the time, people just get a bug bite. The bite might itch for a few days. In places like South Florida, people worry about mosquitoes in the summertime.

South Florida has a lot of mosquitoes. The mosquitoes can carry illness. To stop them, people spray pesticides. The pesticides are poisons. They kill mosquitoes.

There is a problem. The poisons kill butterflies, too.

Save The Butterflies

Scientists noticed that there were fewer butterflies. Wildlife workers wanted to find out why. The workers hired a scientist named Gary Rand. He found the mosquito poisons were killing butterflies, too.

Now people in South Florida are doing more to save the butterflies. They are trying to protect the places where endangered butterflies live. The government has stopped spraying the poisons near the rare butterflies.

“It’s up to us to protect them. They don’t protect themselves,” Rand said.

The Problem With Pesticides

Rand thinks scientists need to look at how pesticides hurt other insects. Scientists already know that pesticides kill honeybees.

South Florida's mosquito problem gets worse after the rainy season during the spring and summer.

Scientists have studied pesticides for years. They learned that pesticides hurt butterflies.

Some Butterflies Are Gone - Forever

Two years ago, scientists found that two kinds of Florida butterflies were extinct. They did more research. They found three more types of butterflies in Florida were probably gone forever. The places where the butterflies lived had been destroyed. People built new houses there. Pesticides also hurt the butterflies.

Last year, two more types of butterflies were found to be in danger. Scientists are trying to help them. Scientists say that four kinds of butterflies are endangered in Florida. If people keep using pesticides, those butterflies could die off.